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ABSTRACT

This conference presentation on promoting effective communications with paraeducators working in special education consists of 13 distinct text items. The items deal with: (1) definition of paraeducators and the roles of teachers in working with paraeducators in inclusive classrooms; (2) the importance of teacher-paraeducator communication; (3) communication strategies; (4) what paraeducators need to know about teachers; (5) a flowchart for the production of paraeducator job descriptions; (6) a sample paraeducator job description; (7) a job description analysis checklist; (8) an instrument to assess the role perception of teachers and paraeducators; (9) a core curriculum for paraeducators; (10) effective use of the paraeducator as a tutor; (11) a form for paraeducators to evaluate instructional sessions they have taught; (12) tutoring guidelines; and (13) a checklist for preparing for the tutoring session. (JDD)

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Promoting Effective Communications with Paraeducators

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Paraeducators in Inclusive Classrooms

Paraeducators: A Definition

Paraeducators are employees: 1) whose positions are either instructional in nature or who deliver other direct services to students and/or their parents; and 2) who serve in a position for which a teacher or another professional has the ultimate responsibility for the design, implementation, and evaluation of instructional programs and student progress.

Paraeducators provide services in the following programmatic areas: educational programs, physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, early intervention and pre-school programs, social work/case management, parent training/child find programs, transition training, supported employment or other vocational education programs, libraries, and health services.

Roles of Teachers

Teachers are responsible for:

- √ Assessing the performance levels of students.
- √ Consulting with professional colleagues and participating in the preparation of individualized education plans (IEPs).
- √ Developing instructional objectives for individual students and the entire class.
- √ Implementing instructional programs along with paraeducators and other professional personnel.
- √ Evaluating the effectiveness of programs.
- √ Involving parents in all aspects of their child's education.
- √ Coordinating and supervising the work paraeducators and other support staff.

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A Training Program for Paraprofessionals Working in Special Education and Related Services. (2nd edition, 1990). New York. National Resource Center for Paraprofessional in Education and Related Services.

Why Communication is Important

- Promote legal/ethical practices
- Meet individual needs of students
- Plan instruction and delivery methods
- Means of providing feedback on instruction
- Evaluation paraeducator's performance
- Promote development of paraeducator's skills
- Promote positive interpersonal relationships
- Resolve conflicts and promote team cohesion

The Teacher's Role in Supervision

- Plan and evaluate instructional activities
- Establish priorities and schedule resources
- Establish classroom management procedures
- Clarify expectation and establish performance standards
- Delegate paraprofessional assignments
- Provide training and support necessary for paraprofessional to be successful
- Evaluation paraprofessional performance
- Provide a supportive work environment

The Teacher's Role in Communicating with the Paraeducator

The special education teacher also has a number of roles to fulfill in the proper utilization of the paraprofessional in the classroom:

- set an example of professionalism with regard to the execution of teacher responsibilities;
- establish the criteria for acceptable job performance of the paraprofessional at the beginning of the school year;
- provide consistent feedback to assist the paraprofessional in refining skills;
- communicate the needs of each student to the paraprofessional;
- establish and communicate the paraprofessional's role in classroom behavior management;
- establish the strategies and schedules for meeting the IEP goals of each student and communicate these to the paraprofessional;
- assign the paraprofessional responsibilities which facilitate the teacher's ability to provide more direct student instruction; and
- assist the paraprofessional in defining his or her position as an authority figure.

Vasa, S. F., Steckelberg, A. L., & Sundermeier, C.D. (1990) Supervising paraprofessionals in special education programs: The teacher's role. Lincoln, NE: Department of Special Education and Communication Disorders, University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Basic Strategies for Clear Communication Between Teachers and Paraeducators

There are a number of elements that must be present in any situation to insure clear channels of communication. Some are commonplace and things we take for granted. If the members of the team are not careful and do not pay attention, positive communication can be inhibited. For example:

- The attitudes and feelings of both teachers and paraeducators need to be known, respected, and understood. They need to deal openly with their attitudes and feelings toward their roles and duties, their attitudes toward the students they work with, their attitudes toward instructional styles and management and their attitudes toward the value of the other person's contributions. When feelings are not shared and openly communicated the nature of the relationship will not grow and the team will be less effective.

- An understanding of the similarities and differences between the people involved in the team must be recognized and understood. They may include different points of view about educational strategies, different values, different cultural and religious heritage's, different levels of education and experience and other factors that can affect the working relationship.

- Teachers, paraeducators, and other education personnel should actively seek to develop and share a common vocabulary.

- Teachers must make sure that directions and expectations are clearly understood and that paraeducators have the information and skills they require to perform their assigned tasks.

- Paraeducators must be willing to ask for clarification or assistance if the assignment is not understood.

- Teachers should determine what special interests, talents, and training the paraeducators have that will complement and enhance their own skills and improve the delivery of education services to children and youth.

- The team must actively work to create a climate of cooperation, trust, respect, and loyalty by meeting regularly to discuss procedures and techniques that will establish and maintain open channels of communication.

A Training Program for Paraprofessionals Working in Special Education and Related Services. (Second edition, 1990). Center for Advanced Study in Education, Graduate School, City University of New York.

What Paraeducators Need to Know about Teachers

Teaching Styles. Teachers, like everyone else have unique characteristics and ways of doing things. These characteristics are rarely given much thought by the teacher because they are such an integral part of the individual's teaching style; but for paraeducators who are in support roles it is imperative that they know as much about these characteristics as possible. Without mutual awareness and understanding of how the teacher prefers to teach the effectiveness of the team can be undermined. Every teacher has a style of his or her own. The style may be flexible, controlling, permissive and/or a combination of all of these and more. Most teachers have an array of teaching strategies they like to use in a specific situation or with a specific student. They may be topic related, skill related, or concept related. For other teachers structured behavior management methods may serve as the basic approach for teaching skills and helping students learn to monitor and maintain effective behavior. Some teachers may rely on self-instruction whereas others will rely on incidental types of learning centers or various types of group or individual projects. No matter what method a teacher uses, it is important for paraeducators to know what teaching repertoires the teacher has chosen and the reasons why they are used with a specific group or an individual student.

Supervisory Styles. Just as teachers have unique teaching styles, they also have distinct supervisory styles. One person may be very structured and provide specific directions based on rules, procedures, program and classroom structures developed by the teacher. Another person may ask the paraeducator to share ideas and information and participate in the decision making/planning process. Still a third person may tend to be non-directive and prefer the paraeducator to learn by observing what the teacher does and then model the behavior.

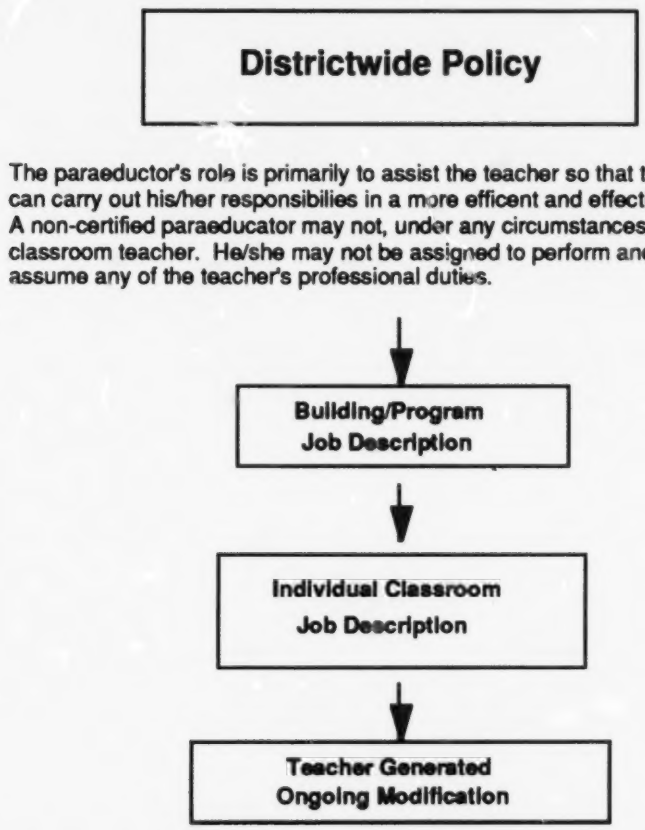
Discipline Strategies. Discipline is for most teachers something that they hold very close and very dear to themselves. How they discipline and why they discipline is known many times only to them. It is important for the paraeducator to understand why one student requires one disciplinary strategy and another with similar behaviors does not.

Utilization of Teaching Materials Teachers, almost like good mechanics, have their favorite tools. In the selection and utilization of instructional materials, teachers very often will rely more on one type of material than on another, even though either one might work in the particular learning situation. Like discipline, it is important for the paraeducator to know why that particular material was selected and is of value in a particular learning situation.

Classroom Rules and Organization. Both structure and rules are integral to the system of discipline and behavior management utilized in the classroom. Structure or a lack of it will very often determine the type of discipline that is used in the classroom. For example, an open classroom setting places considerably more responsibility on students to determine the course of their behavior than a very structured classroom setting does. The paraeducator needs to know why a particular structure has been chosen by the teacher, and why and how it complements the instructional delivery and/or processes.

A Training Program to Prepare Teachers to Supervise & Work Effectively with Paraprofessionals. (2nd Edition, 1989). New York. The NRC for Paraprofessionals in Education and Related Services.

Job Description Flowchart


Districtwide Policy
The paraeductor's role is primarily to assist the teacher so that the teacher can carry out his/her responsibilities in a more efficent and effective manner. A non-certified paraeducator may not, under any circumstances, replace the classroom teacher. He/she may not be assigned to perform and may not assume any of the teacher's professional duties.
Building/Program Job Description
Individual Classroom Job Description
Teacher Generated Ongoing Modification

Benefits of Paraeducator Job Descriptions

1. Validates position
2. Clarifies school position on the appropriate roles of the paraprofessional to teacher and paraprofessional
3. Serves as a process tool in recruitment, selection and interview process.
4. Provides parameters for paraprofessional activities
5. Defines team organization
6. Promotes job satisfaction
7. Identifies prerequisite skills & training needs
8. Defines the supervisor and his/her role
9. Helps adjust performance to certain standards of evaluation
10. Guides evaluation of paraprofessional & teacher

Vasa, S. F., Steckelberg, A. L., & Sundermeier, C.D. (1990) Utilization of paraprofessionals in special education: Student resources handbook. Lincoln, NE: Department of Special Education and Communication Disorders, University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Lincoln Public Schools

Position Title: **Paraeducator**

Assignment: **General Instruction**

Essential Functions:

NOTE: This is a generalized job description. Specific duties and responsibilities vary, depending on the assigned department or school. Applicants should be made aware of the specific functions of the position prior to employment.

Frequent:

- Performs office duties such as attendance reports, typing, filing, and handling routine interruptions such as notes, messages and deliveries.
- Performs routine supervisory duties such as lunchroom, playground, halls and classroom.
- Types, draws, writes and duplicates instructional materials.
- Researches and assembles materials to be used in a particular unit as directed by the teacher.
- Prepares bulletin boards, graphs and charts.
- Reserves films.
- Checks papers, workbooks, homework and tests.
- Helps in the care of the classroom.
- Writes plans on chalkboard, overhead projector.
- Reads to students; listens to students read.
- Helps students with make-up work.
- Assists in individual or group activities, games, flash cards, etc.
- Assists students in interpreting and following directions of the teachers.
- Drills to reinforce any skill the teacher has taught.
- Alerts teacher to needs of students.
- Assists teacher in checking progress of individualized study projects.

Occasion:

- Fills out attendance cards and cumulative records.
- Checks emergency sheets, class lists, etc.
- Collects moneys for books, lab fees, etc.
- Assists with inventory of supplies and equipment.
- Assists with field trips.
- Contacts community resource people.
- Makes educational games and aids.
- Assists when emergencies arise.
- Performs any other delegated non-instructional responsibility assigned by teacher or administrator.

Requirements:

A. High school diploma or equivalent.
B. Good work attendance record.
C. Ability to follow teacher direction and written plans.
D. Ability to maintain student confidentiality.
E. Appropriate communication skills.
F. Ability to work in a team setting.
G. Ability to work with and meet individual needs of children as directed by teachers.
H. Ability to work with or learn to work with various office machines.

Report To: Building Administrator

Receives Guidance From: Teacher, Building Administrator

D.O.T. #: 249.367-074 Elementary FULL TIME (X) PART TIME (X)
099.327-010 Secondary

D.O.T. Class:

Sedentary	Light	Medium	X	Heavy	Very Heavy

Physical Requirements:

	Never 0%	Occasional 1-32%	Frequent 33-66%	Constant 67%+
A. Standing			X	
B. Walking			X	
C. Sitting		X		
D. Bending/ Stooping		X		
E. Reaching/ Pulling		X		
F. Climbing	X			
G. Driving	X			
H. Lifting 40# Max *		X		
I. Carrying 25 Ft.		X		
J. Manual Dexterity Tasks:			X	

Specify: * A-V equipment projectors, TV/VCR, recorders, Telephone, Typewriter/word processor Copier

Other Requirements: (Intellectual, Sensory):

Effective oral and written communication skills.
Skills in human relations, leadership and conflict management.

Working Conditions:

A. Inside Outside Both X

B. Climatic Environment:
Most District classrooms and other work areas are not air-conditioned, and are subject to extremes of temperature and humidity.

C. Hazards: Stairs, Dust, Drafts
Communicable diseases
others (depending on assignment)

Job Description Analysis

Instructions: Analyze the assigned job description to determine if it contains the components listed below. Check those items which are included in the job description. In the space provided, please write suggestions for improving the job description.

_____1. Are the following subtitles included within the job description?
- _____Position Title
- _____Position Setting
- _____Qualifications
- _____Rationale/Purpose for the Position
- _____Orientation/Training Requirements
- _____Duties and Responsibilities
- _____Time & Hours
- _____Duration of the Position
- _____Evaluation/Supervision Guidelines
- _____Salary/Benefits

_____2. Is the title appropriate and reflective of current trends in paraeducator nomenclature?

_____3. Does the job description include enough detail about expectations for the position? (e.g. What the paraeducator will be doing?)

_____4. Does the job description show a true relationship to what paraeducators are currently doing?

_____5. Does the description minimize the abilities/potential of the paraeducator to perform certain educational tasks? Does it demand too much?

_____6. Is the description of the teacher-paraeducator relationship sufficiently detailed? Are line-staff relations with other personnel described?

_____7. Are the paraeducator's responsibilities to and for students detailed?

_____8. Does the supervision section adequately inform the paraeducator to know how he/she will be supervised?

_____9. Does the job description provide direction for the development of paraeducator training programs?

_____10. Is information included on the methods of evaluation of the paraeducator?

_____11. Were all necessary personnel, including paraeducators, consulted in the development of the job description?

Additional Comments and Suggestions:

Vasa, S. F., Steckelberg, A. L.. & Sundermeier, C.D. (1990) Utilization of paraprofessionals in special education: Student resources handbook. Lincoln, NE: Department of Special Education and Communication Disorders, University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Teacher/Paraeducator Role Perception Activity

This instrument is designed to assist the teacher and the paraeducator in determining areas in which they may have differing perceptions of their respective roles. Both the teacher and the paraeducator should independently examine each particular task listed and determine whether the task in one done by both the teacher and the paraeducator or is done primarily by either the teacher or the paraeducator. Indicate your response by circling the corresponding number. If the item does not apply to your situation, leave the item blank. After completing the items, transfer your responses to the score sheet for a comparison of responses.

	Exclusively Teacher	Primarily Teacher	Shared Responsibility	Primarily Para	Exclusively Para
1. Evaluating individual lesson plans	1	2	3	4	5
2. Planning group lesson	1	2	3	4	5
3. Cleaning up after an art lesson	1	2	3	4	5
4. Getting students ready for an activity	1	2	3	4	5
5. Duplicating materials	1	2	3	4	5
6. Supervising playground/recreational activities	1	2	3	4	5
7. Asking parents about student's behavior at home	1	2	3	4	5
8. Informing parents of meetings	1	2	3	4	5
9. Seeing that students stay at the lunch table	1	2	3	4	5
10. Charting students performance	1	2	3	4	5
11. Correcting papers	1	2	3	4	5
12. Constructing instructional materials.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Conducting an individual lesson	1	2	3	4	5
14. Assessing the value of instructional materials	1	2	3	4	5
15. Conducting group lessons	1	2	3	4	5
16. Keeping daily attendance	1	2	3	4	5
17. Ordering instructional materials	1	2	3	4	5
18. Selecting field trip sites	1	2	3	4	5
19. Planning behavior management strategies	1	2	3	4	5
20. Handling a conflict with another classroom teacher	1	2	3	4	5

Vasa, S. F., Steckelberg, A. L.. & Pickett, A. L.. (In Press) Utilizing paraeducators in the classroom as an instructional resource: PDK Fastback. Bloomington IN: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation

Teacher/Paraeducator
Role Perception Score Sheet

Following each item, record the number corresponding to both the teacher's and the paraeducator's response. In the third column, record the value obtained from subtracting the paraeducator's response from the teacher's response. Record the sign as well as the value of the difference.

	Teacher Response	Paraeducator Response	Difference (+ or -)
1. Evaluating individual lesson plans			
2. Planning group lesson			
3. Cleaning up after an art lesson			
4. Getting students ready for an activity			
5. Duplicating materials			
6. Supervising playground/recreational activities			
7. Asking parents about student's behavior at home			
8. Informing parents of meetings			
9. Seeing that students stay at the lunch table			
10. Charting students performance			
11. Correcting papers			
12. Constructing instructional materials.			
13. Conducting an individual lesson			
14. Assessing the value of instructional materials			
15. Conducting group lessons			
16. Keeping daily attendance			
17. Ordering instructional materials			
18. Selecting field trip sites			
19. Planning behavior management strategies			
20. Handling a conflict with another classroom teacher			

Core Curriculum for Paraprofessionals

I. Strengthening the Instructional Team
- Understanding distinctions in the roles and duties of teachers and paraeducators
- Using effective communication and problem solving techniques

II. Legal and human rights of children and youth and their parents

III. Human growth and development

IV. Components of the instructional process
- IEP/IFSP/ITP/Lesson Plans
- Assessment
- Goals and Objectives
- Behavior Management
- Instructional Strategies

V. Appreciating Diversity

VI. Working with Families

VII. Emergency/Health/Safety Procedures

Effective Use of the Paraeducator as a Tutor

- Accurate assessment of the student's entry level skills
- Prescription of appropriate materials by the teacher
- Instruction broken down into several small steps for the tutor to follow
- Explanation of the conditions in which the lesson is to be delivered (location, time limits, restrictions, or special facilities)
- Having needed materials placed in convenient location
- Collection of data at each tutoring session and communication of student's progress to the teacher
- Monitoring and revision of the tutoring session by the teacher

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Tutoring Plan

Objective

Activity

Reinforcement

Materials

Recording Student Performance

Monitoring Student Progress

- Observational recording during lesson
- Frequent performance tests
- Alternating lesson delivery
- Teacher observation of lesson delivery
- Video or audio taping
- Conferences with paraeducator
- Conferences with general education teacher(s)

Adapted from: Vasa, S. F. & Steckelberg, A. L.. (1987) Tutor Training Triad: A Guide for Training Paraeducators. Lincoln, NE: Project PARA, University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Self-Evaluation of the Instructional Session

Instructions: The following questions should be answered by the paraprofessional as soon after completing an instructional session as possible. It should be stressed that the purpose of the activity is the improvement of instructional techniques. The supervising teacher can review the completed form with the paraprofessional and use the results for further support and planning. The form also provides important information on the progress of the student.

	Yes	No
1. Did I prepare well for the lesson?	_____	_____
2. Did I introduce the lesson so that the child understood the concept that the lesson attempted to teach?	_____	_____
3. Was I enthusiastic enough to get the child interested in performing the task?	_____	_____
4. Did I explain what the child was to do in the practice activity so that he or she understood it?	_____	_____
5. Did I have all the materials I needed to teach the lesson?	_____	_____
6. Did I use the appropriate reinforcement techniques?	_____	_____
7. Did I encourage the student when they were having difficulty?	_____	_____
8. Was the lesson successful in reaching the behavioral objective for the unit?	_____	_____

Student Evaluation

1. Was the child able to perform the task required in the lesson?
   Yes No Comment:

2. Did the child need other experiences before attempting the current lesson plan?
   Yes No Comment:

3. Was the child willing to try (motivated) to do the exercise?
   Yes No Comment:

4. Did the student appear interested in the lesson?
   Yes No Comment:

Vasa, S. F., Steckelberg, A. L., & Ronning, L. (1983). Guide for effective utilization of paraprofessionals in special education. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Checklist for Tutors
General Guidelines for Tutoring Another

The following outline provides general guidelines for tutoring. The section is divided into four areas: appropriate attitude, preparation for tutoring, delivery skills, and record keeping.

I. Appropriate Attitude

1. Meet the student in a relaxed, friendly manner
2. Set an example by being courteous and respectful
3. Be supportive and provide encouragement
4. Communicate that learning is an important and worthwhile task
5. Maintain a sense of humor

II. Preparation for Tutoring

1. Learn the proper pronunciation of the student's name
2. Learn about the student's interests, goals, and academic and emotional needs
3. Be familiar with the lesson in advance of the tutoring session
4. Request that the teacher/supervisor model and/or explain the activity
5. Organize necessary instructional materials
7. Prepare location for tutoring session
6. Prepare the student for instruction

III. Delivery Skills

1. Start promptly at assigned time
2. Follow the schedule of activities as outlined by the teacher
3. Follow the instruction for tutoring set down by the teacher, and when you are not sure of what to do, ask the teacher
4. Utilize questioning techniques that direct instruction and require more than yes or no answers
5. Learn to listen to the student and what he/she is saying and give them your full attention
6. Pay attention to non-verbal cues exhibited by the tutee
7. Give feedback to students on their performance
8. Utilize reinforcement procedures which are motivating to the tutee
9. Follow the plan for dealing with behavior of the student
10. Be consistent, follow rules, and provide structure
11. Don't waste the student's time
12. Close the lesson
13. Set expectations for the student

IV. Record Keeping

1. Maintain accurate records on each session of the student's performance
2. Report any concerns or observations to the teacher
3. Respect confidential information about the student

Adapted from: Vasa, S. F. & Steckelberg, A. L.. (1987) Tutor Training Triad: A Guide for Training Paraeducators. Lincoln, NE: Project PARA, University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Preparing for the Tutoring Session

Task Completed

_____ Have I reviewed the tutoring plan?

_____ Do I feel adequately prepared to use the instructional techniques?

_____ Do I know how to begin the tutoring session?

_____ Do I know what to do when the student responds appropriately?

_____ Do I know how to handle to inappropriate responses?

_____ Am I prepared for off-task behavior?

_____ Do I understand the recording procedure?

_____ Do I have the materials ready?

_____ Do I know how to handle the materials?

_____ Do I have the site arranged efficiently?

_____ Is the site comfortable for the student and me?

_____ Do I know how to conclude the tutoring session?

After the Tutoring Session

_____ Have I recorded behavioral observations about the student?

_____ Have I completed the record of the student's performance?

_____ Am I ready to evaluate the session with my supervisor?

How can I improve my performance in the future?

Adapted from: Vasa, S. F. & Steckelberg, A. L.. (1987) Tutor Training Triad: A Guide for Training Paraeducators. Lincoln, NE: Project PARA, University of Nebraska-Lincoln.